



German Toilet Organization



## Local Voices, Regional Change

A learning brief from Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week 2025

### Here Us, Hear Us (a collaboration of the ECT WASH implementing partners: ASB South and Southeast Asia, arche nova Myanmar, Center for Disability in Development, ACCORD)

In December 2025, community representatives and partners from Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Bangladesh stood as advocates and storytellers at the Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week (RHPW) in Bangkok, instead of beneficiaries of aid.

Through the session *“Here Us – Hear Us: Voices from the Margins to Realise Inclusive, Climate-Resilient WASH”*, led by Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund South & Southeast Asia together with the Centre for Disability in Development, ACCORD, and arche noVa, the ECT WASH program demonstrated what meaningful power redistribution can look like in practice. Yet the real impact of this regional advocacy did not end in the forum room. It continued in the confidence, leadership, and actions participants carried back to their communities.

**For many, RHPW was their first regional forum.** The experience shifted their sense of identity from local project participants to contributors to regional humanitarian dialogue.

In Indonesia, Edi, a community leader and person with disability, initially doubted whether he could confidently speak on a multilingual regional panel. After sharing his lived experience on inclusive practice on disaster

preparedness, that doubt transformed into confidence. When he returned home, he began speaking more actively in village forums—something he had previously avoided.

His participation did more than amplify his voice; it also changed how others perceived community leadership. The forum validated that lived experience is not anecdotal but expertise. From his perspective, we learn that **people with disabilities should not be treated as a cross-cutting issue as they are key stakeholders in decision-making.**

A similar shift was felt in Bangladesh. Hossain Mahamud, a person with disability, shared practical examples of inclusive early warning systems as part of the storytelling session. His contribution positioned community knowledge as transferable practice across countries rather than an isolated local experience. The impact was immediate: organisational leadership began integrating stronger localization principles and anticipatory action triggers into program strategies.

His contribution also reinforced another lesson from the session: **inclusive programming benefits the entire community.**





In the Philippines, Dionalyn Johnson described her participation as recognition—not only of representation, but of competence, leadership, and authority. Discussions on collaboration and women’s participation also highlighted persistent gender gaps in project leadership as well as double burden during crises that are often overlooked. Back in Buenavista village, The Philippines, these reflections translated into stronger community engagement in implementation processes and more deliberate inclusion of women in decision-making spaces.

For Daw Seng Mai, the representative from Myanmar, the forum offered an opportunity to connect local realities with global humanitarian discussions. Conversations around natural disasters, gender-based violence, and the vulnerability of women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities resonated deeply with experiences in their own communities. One message was emphasized that *pity creates hierarchy, while compassion is rooted in equality and solidarity*. For Daw Seng Mai, this distinction was powerful. It affirmed that communities should be seen not as recipients of aid, but as equal partners in humanitarian action.

Across all participating countries, a shared realization emerged: discussions on localization, power shifting, and GEDSI-led anticipatory action challenge the long-standing framing of communities as passive recipients of aid. Instead, participants returned with renewed conviction that communities must lead implementation, planning, and decision-making.

In Indonesia, for instance, discussions on power redistribution validated ongoing collaboration with local partners and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDis). What had previously been practiced at smaller scale gained regional legitimacy, strengthening internal commitments to distribute capacity and resources more equitably. In Myanmar, arche nova and its partners began integrating lessons from the forum into programmatic work. Psychosocial support activities—previously limited to gender-based violence projects—are now being promoted across multiple initiatives. Disaster risk reduction perspectives are also being integrated into protection and education activities to strengthen community resilience.

One of the most powerful aspects of the forum was the horizontal learning among community representatives themselves. Women leaders, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minority exchanged experiences directly, discovering that challenges related to exclusion, climate vulnerability, and unequal power structures are shared across countries.

For many participants, standing on a regional platform signaled something deeply important: **legitimacy**. Their presence challenged the common pattern where international forums are dominated by project staff rather than the communities most affected by crises.

Regional advocacy, in this sense, did more than amplify voices. It strengthened leadership, built connections, and reinforced a powerful principle: **those closest to the challenges must also be closest to the decisions**.



“**Pity creates hierarchy, while compassion is rooted in equality and solidarity.**”

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